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ABSTRACT

Recurrent education, as developed in the past four or five years in a number of European countries, is seen as a process of formal, full-time, for credit instruction for adults beyond the age of compulsory schooling in which participation was supposed to take place during intermittent periods throughout the adult working life-span. This would include provisions for reciprocal entrance and exit between recurrent education and work experience. The central feature is the emphasis on formal instruction for credit that leads to certificates of completion recognized in the society as credentialling the student to perform occupational or job-related functions in a production and service economy. While there is serious doubt about the desirability of recurrent education as a sutstitute for higher education, adult education, or adult learning, the metaphor of recurrent education can be used to teach us something about alternative social meanings available for the future of postcompulsory education. After examination of the implications of the concept of recurrent education, it is found that the future of adult education and learning is not best served by the recurrent education model imported from Europe. (Author/KE)

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# RECURRENT EDUCATION: A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE OF ADULT EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN THE UNITED STATES

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# RECURRENT EDUCATION: A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE OF ADULT EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Warren L. Ziegler

## Introduction: Education, Schooling and Learning for Adults

This paper is one of a series of on-going investigations by the Educational Policy Research Center at Syracuse into the future of adult education and learning in the United States. There are a number of alternative models for that future, of which recurrent education, the focus of this paper, is one. Other models also under investigation include, for example, a strictly vocational/occupational model--i.e., career education--a voluntary learning model based on an electronic-based communications network, a model of political education for all citizens, an instrumental model based on reducing age-group and social-group inequities, and a model which redefines the criteria for allocating credentials among adults.

Some models for the future are concerned with the education of adults, while others are concerned with a broader and more generic concept of the learning of adults, of which their continuing education would be only one aspect. That distinction, between learning and education, is as important to make for adults as for children, and for much the same reasons. No one should claim that all learning of youth takes place in the formal school system. Yet we habitually make that claim until confronted with both research and our own experience. These suggest that the learning of youth comprises

a much richer and more complex maze of human behavioral change than six to eight hours per day in a formal school setting could possibly hope to account for.

Still, at least until recently, it has been convenient for educational policy makers, the education profession and parents, to act as if schooling and education were co-terminous, and that both concepts covered all, or at least the most significant aspects, of learning. Today, much of the critique of schooling for youth in the United States rests on a dawning recognition that our understanding of all three terms--schooling, education and learning--is undergoing substantial review.

For adults, the distinction between education and learning is of equal significance and at least as difficult to make in a way which provides clear guidelines for public policy formulation. For, as we discuss later on, adult learning in the United States has always represented a vast and pervasive form of behavioral response to social change. Moreover, adult learning has generally taken place without the formal institutional accouterments and apparatus of schooling. The central issue, when looking at the future for adults, is how much and which aspects of this adult learning will and should be called education, and thus become a matter of public policy?

Certainly, education uses adults' learning potentials and encompasses some kinds of adults' learning behaviors. Education, as the term is used throughout this paper, represents socially-legitimated learning activities. This means that they are a target for the allocation of resources via public expenditure budgets. These are adult learning activities whose purposes--i.e., learning goals--are understood to contribute to some social need, goal or function in such a way as to bring into play social sanctions and rewards. These social purposes include, for example, better jobs, a more productive economy, a more enlightened citizenry, better parents and consumers, or getting poor people off the relief roles.

Two problems quickly arise with this distinction. The first is that, as

with the schooling of youth, there may be little agreement now, and even less in the future, about what "better" and "more" mean when applied to societal concepts like occupation, economy, citizenship values or the poverty-welfare cycle. Lack of social consensus would make it most difficult to generate a national policy about adult education. Both a policy and a consensus about its purposes are lacking at present.

The second problem involved in this distinction between adult education and adult learning has to do with the apparent tendency in this society to institutionalize noble educational purposes through the accretion of a formalistic apparatus of constraints--i.e., credentials, accreditation, certification and the like--which denudes both education and learning of its excitement, its variety and its personal satisfaction. This has already happened with the schooling of many youth, which is why people who do not share Ivan Illich's fundamental critique of American society are nevertheless intrigued with his program for "deschooling" society.

But for adults, this problem is in a way more complex, particularly if we try to trace out some of its aspects for the future. For in the United States, adult education is not compulsory, as is schooling for youth. Therefore, we are investigating the future domain of post-compulsory education, that is, post-schooling. The punishments and rewards available to an adult education system which provides social legitimacy to some kinds of adult learning are--or at least have been--uneasily translated into formal, legal mechanisms. It is still moot as to whether, as a matter of law, we can force adults to return to "school" as a legal requirement to obtain social welfare payments. Constitutional issues aside, it is very doubtful that adults can be forced to learn what public policy tells them they are supposed to learn.

In short, in a dynamic, reasonably open society still in transition, there must always be an uneasy balance and shifting compromise between adult education and adult learning. Indeed, even conceptually clear distinctions

between adult education and learning are probably as much a matter of value judgments as they are of social scientific research into the nature and variety of adult learning. In other words, what comprises education is a social definition. What should become adult education in the future is not so much a problem in social forecasting as it is a problem in defining the criteria for the development of a national policy which would not reduce adult learning to adult schooling in the name of adult education.

## Recurrent Education as Adult Education: A Definition

This paper examines, in a preliminary way, the model of recurrent education, which is creeping into the lexicon of American debate on post-compulsory education out of policy analysis and research under way in Europe. The idea and promises of recurrent education have received a substantial amount of attention in certain member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in the last four years, notably Sweden, France and Yugoslavia, as well as within the professional staff, Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the O.E.C.D.

The idea of recurrent education has not entered educational policy debates in the United States in the "pure" form of the model as originally conceived in Sweden. The external degree program, the American variations of the idea of an "open university" developed in Britain, the more familiar work-study programs of several universities, and the adult evening college movement in the United States all represent substantial and ad hoc, variations of the central features of recurrent education. In the "pure" form, recurrent education is defined as a post-compulsory educational system for credit, whose basic characteristic is the alternation of periods of education and of active, working life through the life span. It means abandoning the conventional strategy of concentrating all formal education in the individual's youth period.[1]

The initial appeal of recurrent education as an alternative worthy of policy consideration in the United States stems from the current, "hot" debate on the means and ends of higher education. Recurrent education is seen as a way of relieving certain demographic, political, financial and ideological pressures on that system.

The tack taken in this study, however, is to examine the idea of recurrent education within the social context of the future of adult education and learning in the United States, rather than higher education. There are at least two reasons for choosing this context. First, in terms of scholarly research, policy debates and public expenditure budgets, adult education and learning must be considered a very poor cousin to the heavily financed, mammoth core system of formal education in this country, very much including higher education. Nevertheless, by some criteria of significance, adult education and early-childhood education represent the two most significant domains for educational expansion and innovation during the remaining years of this century. Indeed, adult education and, more importantly, adult learning may well comprise both historically and futuristically a major contributing factor to the generic capacity of this society to employ educative processes in the on-going resolution of pervasive, sometimes critical, non-educational problems.

Second, consider the policy debates and analyses now under way in Europe on the feasibility of recurrent education as a new system of post-compulsory education, not parallel to but replacing their current systems of higher education and adult education. European work has not been undertaken solely to discover a hoped-for pressure-valve to relieve political as well as demographic congestion in universities and colleges (as is apparently true in this country). In part, the development of the idea of recurrent education represents a response to a much more holistic perception of education through the life-span than is presently acceptable in either academic research or public policy circles in the United States.

Thus, in this preliminary study, we view recurrent education as a provocative policy metaphor which forces a much-needed assessment of the existing practice of learning through the life-span in the United States, and its relationship to the emergence of a more formal process and system of life-long education. Learning is a vital, indeed immanent, human characteristic which in modern societies far transcends social attempts to restrict its occurrence to the institutions of schools and colleges, with their debilitating control mechanisms, as presently implemented, of credits, degrees, examinations, accreditation, and all the rest of the impedimenta of institutional maintenance and survival. Our view of emerging themes and problems in post-industrial America (i.e., a society still in the long-term process of dynamic self-transformation) leads us to the belief that the future of adult education and learning in the next few decades has an absolutely crucial role to play in enhancing the capacity of citizens of this society to confront their "alternative futures" with the knowledge, skills, and wisdom which will be demanded of them.

Recurrent education, as the idea has developed in the past four or five years in a number of European countries, is not co-extensive with either adult education or adult learning. In the largest sense, however, recurrent education is for adults (though it has major consequences for the education of youth). But as already noted, adult learning and adult education are not the same phenomenon. European discussions of recurrent education are not clear about some important distinctions to be made. Among professional adult educators in this country, there is also by no means universal agreement about the grounds for distinguishing between the two domains.[2] We suggest that learning has been a pervasive characteristic of adult experience in the United States since its founding, and before. But only since the 1920's has adult education become a field of social activity marked by academic career training, by the formation of professional associations, by the rapid growth of institutionalized adult learning environments, and by formal research into its theory and practice. In the last forty years, a formidable but still unsatisfactory attempt has been made to delimit the field of adult education.

The objective has been to identify from among the prolific, self-initiated-and-directed learning activities of adults those which should become the proper business of adult education.

But the distinction between adult learning and education still eludes adequate conceptual clarity, and for a very good reason. Agreement among both theoreticians and practitioners (including the learners or clients) about what adult education is requires agreement about its purposes and goals, and an understanding of the special public tasks which adult education should undertake in the maintenance and reconstruction of society. That agreement does not exist. American society is now undergoing transition, one consequence of which is to seriously call into question historically legitimated meanings ascribed to the educative process of systemic and sequential learning for youth, which we call schooling. A society whose citizens are no longer certain about what and who education is for is unlikely to engender consensus about that educational enterprise applied to adult needs, roles and responsibilities in an age of social transition.

A major problem, then, for probing the future of adult education and learning as the context for recurrent education is to delimit the kinds of institutional and human behavior about whose future we are concerned. Adult learning is considered a major, continuing mode of adult behavioral change. It permeates the major categories of human experience and the major sectors of society. But adult education has not dealt with all social themes and categories of human experience. Thus, a critical futures-question is to identify those emerging social themes and problems which will spark an adult learning response irrespective of public policy for adult education. Among these themes and problems, some will produce--for non-educational reasons--a new agreement on which should become the focus of adult education. As concern with these emerging social themes and problems becomes socially-legitimated, a consensus develops which forms the new basis for public policy for adult education. The point is, then, that education can be understood as a social phenomenon, which gives specific form and content to learning

behaviors--certainly not to all, but to those which have become viewed as socially legitimate expressions of human change and development.

## Some Emerging Themes of Post-Industrial Society

Recurrent education, as the concept has emerged in the Western European context, has been inextricably bound up with social concerns about the future of (1) equality of educational and economic opportunity, and (2) socio-economic change per se, including work, jobs, occupations, careers, and technological impacts on these phenomena. In the United States, most researchers would agree[3] that the primary (though by no means sole) social legitimation for adult education has been located in the domain of economic activity. . .in vocational training, in occupational upgrading, in career education, and in professional renewal. This should come as no surprise, since the predominant theme of American society at least since the Civil War has been economic development--that is, the production and consumption of economic goods. Should we forecast a continuing emphasis upon the production and consumption of material goods as the predominant theme of America's future? On several grounds, that would seem to be a risky proposition. Alternative themes for a post-industrial society are even now emerging. Which of them will achieve star status as primary issues for publicly acknowledged dispute and public policy attention is difficult to forecast, because (1) they are not "independent variables," but mutually interact, and because (2) the development and more precise refinement of these issues will be influenced, in the long-run, by trans-national factors over which the American society will have by no means unilateral control.

The following iteration of emerging post-industrial themes and problems is by no means exhaustive or unbiased. Still, it is a first cut at outlining a future agenda for adult learning. That is, these emerging or durable social themes represent new or continuing challenges to which adults may employ a learning response. Some of these concerns will also reach a point of public

consciousness so as to become the target of a socially legitimated focus, and thus the publically acknowledged business of adult education and public policy for adult education. It is not yet clear which of these thematic concerns will receive star status. The list for a future agenda for adult learning--though not necessarily adult education--might include:

(1) the continuing problem of poverty in the midst of material affluence, which is a special aspect of the general theme of distributive justice or social equity.

(2) the trend towards a world bound together by the cement of transnational economic organization and electronic communications with an appreciable increase in the gap between materially rich and poor nations.

(3) the alternative uses and meanings of affluence. The issue here has something to do with the erosion of personal satisfactions coincident with the increasing material abundance of goods and services. The quest for material affluence has clearly been accompanied, historically, with a widespread sense of social alienation, and personal discontent and anxiety. Affluence may become redefined as the opportunity for personal rediscovery and renewal, for developing a sense of personal effectiveness and authenticity outside of the framework of "getting and spending." Still, there would remain a critical issue about the basis for distributing these opportunities among different socio-economic groups. . .perhaps a question of the redistribution of work and leisure.

(4) the emergence of a science and technology of human behavior based upon exponentially increased power for genetic manipulation, for control of the autonomic nervous system and physical and chemical intervention into the historically sacrosanct domain of "mind," "will," "intentionality," and "personality."

(5) the seeking-after and potential development of alternative, consciously-determined life-styles within a future society whose mass institutions of formal youth education, pervasive electronic communications and large-scale, bureaucratic organization may have a more powerful homogenizing effect on systems of belief and social aspirations. This would transform the perennial issues of plurality and diversity from the context of the "melting pot" myth, engendered during the period of large-scale immigration, to the possibility and desirability of deliberate seeking for diverse life-styles.

(6) the issue of dispersing the locus of governance and policy from the center to the periphery of a technologically and economically highly inter-dependent society such that local initiative, participation and control become the target for social and political invention.

(7) the transformation in the meaning of work, engendered in part by trends implicit in emerging themes (3) and (5) above, in part by exponential impacts of high-technology on the production and consumption of goods and services.

(8) the redefinition of minimum levels and contents of functional literacy in a society in which the capacity to use knowledge and manage information (including its discard, rejection, production and retrieval) becomes the major requirement for cognitive skill training.

Each of these emerging themes of potential social concern interact, overlap and require substantially more definitional clarity than the scope of this paper permits. Still, it is interesting to note that the idea of recurrent education is a response primarily to a range of issues contained in the themes of equality (1), and work (7), with peripheral concern about the dispersion of <u>educational</u> governance and initiative (a variation of

(6) above) and the redefinition of the goals and curricula of formal, compulsory schooling for youth (a variation of (8) above).

## The Historical Context in the United States for Considering Recurrent Education

We may regard this partial list of emerging post-industrial themes as challenges. By this, we mean only that some--but not all--inherited institutional structures of adult roles and expectations, and their supporting systems of legitimizing beliefs, will appear inadequate to meet new conditions. The "challenge," then, is to adults to modify their behaviors--to change their ways of thinking, feeling and acting. But there is no certain formula for ensuring that the adult response will continue to take the form of the learning mode.

For learning is by no means the only fundamental mode of human response to change, challenge, even crises. So confronted, people sometimes retreat into tradition. Sometimes they revert to mindless violence. They can withdraw from active social engagement into passive acceptance of change. All these modes of behavior exist, and probably will continue to do so. But throughout his history, the adult American has displayed a rather remarkable capacity to learn new ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Indeed, the history of the United States can be reasonably viewed as the historic development of a vast array of institutions and belief systems in which learning is positively encouraged and built into role expectations and self-definitions. Will that development continue into a future in which the rate of change, the impact of challenge and the urgency of crisis increase? Whether or not it will--i.e., to what extent and under what conditions--and whether or not recurrent education comprises a reasonable public policy for the future of adult education are questions which may be illuminated by a brief examination of the historical context.

Adult education and learning in the United States has constituted a non-systematized response of human beings and institutions to a wide range of changes in the larger society and, indeed, the world. It has constituted a remarkably powerful though largely unsung response to major forces of social change unleashed by the industrial and scientific revolutions as these began to take hold in major social sectors during the middle of the 19th century. Scores of millions of adults learned to develop new skills and new understandings and to acquire knowledge commensurate with the political, economic and social birth and maturation of a major, new nation.

Most of this adult learning was haphazard in the sense that it was "not a consciously directed affair, but rather the result of spontaneous participation in the day-to-day activities of the society."[4] It was non-systematized. It took place wherever and whenever adults congregated under those conditions which encouraged or required a learning approach to the new situations of work, politics, immigration and nation-building, upward mobility, urbanization, and feeding a rapidly expanding population. It is peculiarly true of the learning activities of American adults that they have not been encompassed within a highly structured and comprehensive education system.

In the middle of the 19th century, the United States embarked upon the development of a massive, formal system of schools--and later colleges--for youth. Public policy opted for a front-loading system of preparatory education rather than a flexible, open-access system of continuing education through the life-span. This lack of formalized system has given to both adult education and learning a highly potent, flexible and at the same time unregulated character. This historical premise makes forecasting its future state highly problematic.

One result of this unregulated, non-compulsory character of adult learning is the lack of adequate documentation about the educative activities of scores of millions of adults. Estimates of the number of adults who engage in formal, instructional, learning range from a low of twenty to a

high of sixty or more millions. The figures are too ephemeral to provide an adequate base for projection of this participation. Some recent research does tend to confirm this historical premise that adults spend a great deal more time in deliberate learning projects--among a small group of intensively-interviewed adults, an average of 700-800 hours per year--than has generally been assumed.[5] Much of this learning evidently constitutes the purposeful acquisition of new knowledge and skills in a self-directed fashion outside of an institutional framework of adult education. Since much of it does not take place within the formal system of credits, certified teachers and accredited institutions, it has so far defied systematic description and explanation.

However, there has also been a rather rapid growth in the last twenty years in adult participation in systematized, instructional activities and formal learning environments--i.e., <u>those constituted specifically and deliberately for the purposes of the teaching and learning of adults in clearly defined content areas</u>. Here, we refer to the plethora of formalized, instructional activities carried on by the adult service arms of schools and colleges, both on location and at extension outlets, by correspondence, by industrial, corporate and governmental organizations for their employees, by churches, voluntary organizations, educational television (both commercial and public networks), by community service facilities like museums and libraries, by professional associations of lawyers, doctors and engineers, by labor unions for their members, and by community action organizations.

We possess only partial and suggestive data about the specific dimensions and character of these organizational responses to adult learning needs. Moreover, there are crucial distinctions to be drawn among essential features of these formal learning environments which are constituted primarily--often solely--for instructional purposes. Some of these environments are <u>organized within the core system of schools and colleges</u>, offering adults instruction for credit, leading to certificates of level of educational

attainment like high school diplomas (or their equivalents) as well as baccalaureates and professional degrees. The "new" external degree program emerging in New York State, and the older, evening college program of several universities are a case in point. Adult participation in for-credit instruction constitutes, however, a small category of adult learning behavior.[6]

But higher continuing education for adults also offers a great variety of programs in which no traditional educational devices of standardized examinations, state-certified teachers, degree-credits and the like are involved. Since these control mechanisms are central to the core system of higher education, and enhance its systemic character of interchangeability of parts, it is difficult to describe even these formal learning environments of adult education as a "system."

In short, the historic development of adult learning in the United States has been non-systematic, generally unacknowledged in public policy, highly voluntary and yet at the same time highly pervasive. Similarly, we can scarcely call the emergence, in the 20th century, of adult education a system like the school system. Adult evening colleges, university extension, public school adult education are all after-thoughts of a front-loading, formal education system for youth. Thus, even adult education, which is only a small part of adult learning, still represents a generally non-systematized social phenomenon in which the application of sanctions and rewards is much less clear than in the sequential core system of elementary, secondary and higher education. That is the historical context within which we turn now to a brief examination of recurrent education. But we must remember that there is also a future context which may be in some ways substantially different than the past, as new social themes and problems emerge.

Some Salient Differences in the American and European Contexts for Recurrent Education

In the decade of the 1960's, most industrialized nations of the world embarked upon a public policy of rapid expansion of their formal educational systems. In 1961, the O.E.C.D. Washington Policy Conference on Economic Growth and Investment in Education officially avowed the intention to invest in educational expansion in order to promote economic growth.[7] The notion of education as an investment in human resources regarded as capital, coupled with manpower development and planning instruments, certainly contributed to an extraordinary expansion of participation in formal educational systems, particularly at the secondary level.[8] While this expansion raised the level of educational attainment in O.E.C.D. member countries, it did not significantly reduce social disparities in participation, particularly in secondary and higher education, based on socio-economic class of origin.[9] In short, selection into secondary and higher education continued to favor upper and middle social classes, despite major expansion of facilities, expenditure of educational budgets, and a growing social belief in the efficacy of education. This social fact, coupled with a public policy concern for bringing about equality of educational opportunity both between and within generations, is a major, if not the primary, social problem whose resolution is the concern of advocates of recurrent education in Europe.

In recent years, a complex set of social events and forces have produced grave, publicly--acknowledged, questions about the efficacy of systems of formal, mass schooling, universal, compulsory, lock-step, age-graded and upward expanding into post-secondary levels. That questioning has led to the proliferation of proposed educational alternatives: community education, individualized instruction, campus plans for K-12, open access, space-free/time-free education, career education, decentralized control, work-study systems, life-long learning, education permanente, and many more besides. Recurrent education represents still another "new"

idea; a policy metaphor which, like the others, stands for a general solution in search of rather precise problems.

Since the late 1960's, beginning in Sweden and rapidly moving to other relatively affluent member nations of O.E.C.D.--though greatly modified in the United States--the idea of recurrent education has acquired a certain amount of notoriety as a major alternative, beyond the years of compulsory schooling, to presently existing systems of higher and post-secondary education. Conceptual analysis of recurrent education and the formation of an adequate data base relevant to that analysis has only just commenced.[10] The promise of recurrent education for the future is metaphorically rich. But what the idea of recurrent education will stand for and mean as modern societies move into new stages of their continuing transformation has yet to be adequately analyzed and assessed.

Our assessment of the problems and prospects for introducing a system of recurrent education in the United States is very preliminary, for two reasons. First, as we have already discussed, there is a paucity of relevant, reliable data about the learning and education of scores of millions of adults, from which sound projections can be made. Second, the idea of recurrent education has emerged within Western European societies which possess certain social, political and educational conditions fundamentally different than those which obtain in the United States.

Consider first, that in the United States, over the next ten to fifteen years, it will be possible (as distinguished from desirable), to afford universal, mass higher education immediately following high school for all those Americans who demand it.[11] This is one, major indicator of projected increasing affluence in the United States. That forecast can scarcely be applied to any other country in the world except Japan. Still, in many industrialized nations there is an increasing social demand for opportunities to acquire the <u>non-educational</u> benefits of higher income,

personal status and job status traditionally associated with higher levels of formal educational attainment.

Consider second, that unlike the United States, many O.E.C.D. member countries possess in their Ministries of Education a formally centralized, national apparatus for public policy decisions about education. That can scarcely be said of the U.S. Office of Education or any other federal agency. State Departments of Education do, of course, possess increasing public policy power in the fields of public higher education. But there are huge disparities among the fifty states. These will make it next to impossible to introduce the kind of uniform, radical structural change in all post-secondary education (both higher and adult) called for in recurrent education without federal intervention on a scale for beyond what we have historically been prepared to accept.

Consider third, that the burgeoning development of a rich mix of adult education programs, and the continuing pervasiveness and variety of adult learning behaviors defuses some (though by no means all) of the volatile issues of social change to which recurrent education is calculated to respond. Chief among these issues is the capacity of an increasingly specialized, interdependent industrial society to provide learning opportunities (formal or informal) for its adult citizens to upgrade, renew and develop additional, new occupational/job skills commensurate with the impacts of high technology (what Kahn and Wiener call the major, deliberate innovative mode of research and development)[12] on economic organization, and the concomitant trends towards the production and consumption of knowledge and human services (e.g., health, recreation and leisure, other "quality-of-life" needs, etc.). The non-systematized, non-centralized and non-formalized multiplicity of educative enterprises for adult learning in this society have responded to this need more effectively than any other industrializing nation in the world, with the arguable exception of the Scandinavian countries. That history is no sufficient basis for making claims about the future. It

does suggest, however, the need for more substantial research and policy analysis. At present, we can only attempt this preliminary assessment of recurrent education as a model for the future of post-compulsory education.

Consider, fourth, that the central idea of the recurrent education model has received almost no research attention in this country. A search through the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education brought to light not one research monograph or any other document generated in United States research circles exploring recurrent education per se. With few exceptions, the central idea of recurrent education has so far received little discussion about its application to the American context.

All of this is not to suggest that there is no need for major policy revisions and inventions for all post-compulsory education, both higher and adult. We only mean that the assessment of the recurrent education model for the future of adult education and learning must be set in an American context. This context contains certain relevant conditions fundamentally different than those obtaining in other countries which have given birth to and nurtured the idea of recurrent education.

## The Central Features of the Model of Recurrent Education; And Variations on the Theme

A review of some of the literature on recurrent education, produced since 1969 primarily under the auspices of O.E.C.D.'s Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), demonstrates (1) initial, euphoric agreement on the potency of the recurrent education solution, followed by (2) an attempt to clarify and get agreement on the problems which it purports to solve, succeeded by (3) an erosion of agreement on what recurrent education means, and its likely consequences.[13]

The minimum central notion of recurrent education was succinctly stated by Mr. Olaf Palme, Swedish Minister of Education at the Sixth Conference of European Ministers of Education held at Versailles in May 1969: ". . .all post-secondary education is organized on a recurring basis, that all people, after completing upper secondary education, go out into a job, that after some time at work they take another period of education, then return to a job again, pass through another period of education, and so on."[14]

At the outset, then, recurrent education was seen as a process of formal, full-time, for-credit instruction, for adults beyond the age of compulsory schooling, in which participation was supposed to take place during intermittent periods throughout the adult working life-span, with provisions for reciprocal entrance and exit between recurrent education and work experience, i.e., jobs in the organized economic sector.[15]

Early discussions of this idea reveal other, central features. Recurrent education assumes compulsory, formal schooling to some age for all youth, even as much as 11 or 12 years. It assumes recurrent education is not compulsory. This non-compulsory character clearly will require imaginative social inventions to solve the problem of recruitment and selection into a recurrent education system. Note the experience that demonstrates how much a successful early schooling experience--which is compulsory--positively influences the likelihood of adults voluntarily returning to or participating in formal education in later years. Those adults--a vast number even in the United States--who by virtue of low income, low social class of origin, and/or an unsuccessful experience in their compulsory youth schooling would not tend to participate in higher or adult education represent a major target group for recurrent education. Given its non-compulsory character, the question of social sanctions and rewards, as discussed earlier, becomes a paramount strategy issue. In the United States, the very idea of education is so closely allied with the experience of schooling as to render unrealistic any traditional strategies for recruiting groups of last entry into a formal

system of recurrent education. A major issue for policy research into the future of adult education and learning is just this: to explore alternative systems of sanctions and rewards for encouraging continuing learning among those adults who, for whatever reasons, are not habituated to the learning mode of response to challenge, change and crisis.

A second, essential characteristic is related to this strategy issue. For, as originally developed, recurrent education is for credit, resulting in the issuance of educational certificates of completion for sequential levels of formal educational attainment. Since recurrent education radically expands the age limits for participation, and at the same time restricts the time limits for participation to probably no more than one year of full-time attendance sandwiched between X number of years of work, it requires a rather careful encapsulation of learning-units or blocks which are sequential, measurable, standardized, and amenable to rate-of-return analysis by those institutions which pay for the participants' costs (including tuition, earnings foregone, and family living stipends).

Finally, it is assumed in early analysis that recurrent education, as a system, should replace the present system of sequential (immediately or soon after high school graduation) higher education in such a way as to satisfy the total social demand for higher education as compulsory schooling completion rates continue (as generally forecast) to rise over the next few decades to close to 100% in the more affluent, post-industrial societies.[16]

Clearly, as discussions and preliminary analysis have moved forward in the past few years, a wide range of problems about the meanings, goals, consequences, and feasibility of recurrent education have emerged. For example, in the United States, some aspects of the idea have been taken up--without the metaphor--in proposals of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, i.e.:

1. "That opportunities be created for persons to re-enter higher education throughout their active careers in regular daytime classes, nighttime classes, summer courses, and special short-term programs, with degrees and certificates available as appropriate."

2. "That opportunities be expanded for students to alternate employment and study, such as the 'sandwich' programs in Great Britain, and the programs at some American colleges."

3. "That alternative avenues by which students can earn degrees or complete a major portion of their work for a degree be expanded to increase accessibility of higher education for those to whom it is now unavailable because of work schedules, geographic location, or responsibilities in the home."

4. "That all persons, after high school graduation, have two years of post-secondary education placed 'in the bank' for them to be withdrawn at any time in their lives when it best suits them."[17]

These four Carnegie proposals cover a wide range of structural strategies (e.g., external degrees, home-based learning and independent study via electronic instructional technologies, etc.) which are substantial modifications of some features of the initial recurrent education model. They do include, however, what might be considered the central feature of recurrent education. That is the emphasis on formal instruction, for credit, leading to certificates of completion recognized in the society as credentialling the student to perform occupational or job-related functions in a production and service economy.

It is this characteristic which, perhaps more than any other feature of the model, raises serious questions about the desirability of recurrent education as a substitute for present systems of higher education and non-systems of adult education and learning. A very major problem for

the future of all education in the United States is figuring out how to break the cement which binds together the educational and non-educational benefits of a mass system of formal education. This is an endemic structural problem in all industrialized societies which support policies to activate equality of educational opportunity within a system of social class stratification and selection which defies non-authoritarian government policies to redistribute life chances and life amenities according to some criteria of distributive justice or social equity. When life chances and amenities are inextricably interwoven with the social organization of the economic structure (i.e., criteria and standards for recruitment and selection into an hierarchical status system of jobs and occupations, and subsequent promotion), then education and economy are cemented together by the transmutation of educational benefits into non-educational benefits.

The combination of a front-loading system of formal, compulsory schooling for youth with its increasing success in quantitative terms (80% of all youth in the United States now complete 12 years of formal schooling) has made that system a major social device for selecting and distributing youth into formal adult roles, chief among which is participant in the economic order as producer and consumer. A high school diploma has become a social necessity for entrance into occupations which provide minimum levels of income, status and a sense of self-worth in an affluent, middle-class society. Increasing social demand for higher education among high school graduates represents no great love of learning per se. It represents a conscious recognition that as 80% or more youth complete 12 grades of compulsory schooling, the non-educational benefits previously distributed by the device of acquiring a high school diploma atrophy. Higher education is now seen as the mechanism of selection into and distribution of non-educational benefits and rewards so long as the criteria for this distribution continue to follow social class lines.

Recurrent education attempts to break the linkage between social class of origin, level of educational attainment and these non-educational benefits

on the grounds that the chief use for a formal system of education is the redistribution of goods and services, income and job opportunity in society. That goal is noble. Our criterion for and system of distributive justice in the United States are deplorable. But that goal clearly traduces and soon winnows out any other concept of educational purposes when a formal education system becomes the major public policy instrument for achieving non-educational equity. The problem is not with the need to achieve equity, but with discovering alternative means of doing so, of which a guaranteed annual income, the provision of adequate health care to all citizens, a truly progressive income tax structure, and the separation of technical training from education represent just a few of the more obvious possibilities.

Equity issues will continue to plague public policy in this country. But that social concern, a durable theme in American history, is by no means the only or even the most important social problem emerging in the future. There will be a range of critical issues confronting this society in the near future, some of which were suggested in a previous section of this paper. The question which confronts the future of adult education and learning is which of these should become a matter of public policy for which adult education, indeed perhaps the entire system of education, may be an effective instrument for the transformation of the fundamental ways we view ourselves, our society and the world. Equity issues are one--but only one--item on that future agenda. Recurrent education, because of its emphasis on for-credit education and the distribution of certificates and credentials would seem to tighten the bonds which, in the 20th century, have linked education and economy in industrial societies.

Indeed, there are some grounds for believing that these bonds will loosen in the future. These have to do with the emerging themes and problems of a post-industrial society which set the environment for the future of adult education and learning. We shall examine briefly some of these themes and problems which are, at the surface at least, relevant to a preliminary assessment of the recurrent education model.

Some Social Problems of the Future as Criteria for Assessment of Recurrent Education

Let it be said at the outset that the future social problems set forth below had begun to emerge in the United States in the middle of this century. We see them less as "discontinuities," to use Peter Drucker's phrase, and more as continuing features of an industrial society in transition which may well reach critical-mass levels such that they become publicly recognized and acknowledged social issues amenable to attempts at public policy resolution.

(1) Work. There are reasons to believe that the socially legitimized meaning of work will undergo substantial transformation in the future. Following the Protestant reformation and the development of Capitalism, the notion of work as an instrument of salvation and social legitimation for a sense of personal worth and identity became tied to the structures of job and occupation in an industrializing economy. For many job-holders and wage-earners, the psychological satisfactions of work as economic production have eroded under its increasing routinization. It is by no means clear what social and psychological space will be the locus for work in the future. Work may well no longer be confined to the economic sector of industrial production and mass consumption of material goods. Should such be the case, the promise that recurrent education can serve as a mechanism for resolving problems of occupational obsolescence under the pressures of technological innovation may turn out to be ephemeral. This is only to suggest that continuing education over the life-span may well serve an increasing range of non-economic-oriented learning needs, in which case one major reason for application of the certification function of education begins to disappear.

(2) Equity and Justice. Problems of social equality will no doubt plague our society for many years to come. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how equality issues can ever disappear completely without the rather absolute reconstruction of both society and self-conception. However,

equality issues may become reduced within the domain of material living standards if and when this society agrees to guarantee a reasonable standard of living to all its citizens as a social right of membership, and irrespective of levels of formal educational attainment or formal role in the economic sector. Indeed, it is quite possible that public debate will soon escalate over the trade-off between increases in educational budgets (for recurrent or any kind of post-secondary education) and increases in public expenditure budgets for eliminating poverty in the society.

Since recurrent education as originally conceived was addressed, in part, to ameliorating the problem of groups of last entry into the formal education system (the poor, the lower class, the disenfranchised, etc.), by providing non-perjorative opportunities for re-entry at later (adult) ages irrespective of previous level of educational attainment (or drop-out), these specific pressures may erode with the advent of some form of guaranteed living standard.

(3) The Continuing Intractability of Formal Educational Systems to Innovate. One consequence of recurrent education emerging for discussion in the CERI and other documents examined is the need to undertake substantial modifications of the contents, aims and pedagogies of compulsory youth schooling. Included in this discussion are concerns for redefining the content of a general education and introducing at the same time into the secondary level vocational curricula calculated to prepare youth to perform effectively in the job-skill requirements of an emerging knowledge-based economy. Secondary school vocational education in this country, in addition to its historically endemic social selection character (i.e., tracking), does not now possess a very satisfactory record for preparing its graduates for employment in sophisticated jobs which require flexibility, adaptability, and rapid learning skills, as distinguished from routinized jobs which can be learned almost irrespective of level of formal educational attainment.

One example of this intractability in both K-12 and higher education is the apparent failures of school and college-based programs to produce any substantial success in the formal education of disadvantaged adults through ABE and other federal and state-supported "poverty" type literacy and manpower development and training programs.[18] While there are exceptions, and they may increase, the norms, standards and definitions in our formal educational system for cognitive and affective behaviors and outcomes, for instructional models and techniques, and for the social organization of the teacher-learner relationship will not be easily transformed to accommodate disadvantaged adults. Moreover, these norms, standards and definitions cannot be easily divorced from the certification, accreditation and credentialing characteristics of our formal, core system of education. To extend that system to the education of adults, advantaged and disadvantaged alike, could turn out to be a major tragedy for the future of adult education and learning.

(4) Social and Economic Cost Factors. The kind of social and economic cost-benefit analysis required to assess a system of recurrent education vis-a-vis a mix of other systems of post-secondary education is far too large an undertaking for the scope of this paper. Some very preliminary analysis performed for CERI indicates the complexity of the task.[19] For example, current social definitions of adult roles and responsibilities include wage-earner and family-provider. Costs of adult participation full-time, and/or away from home and job must include not only tuition, books, etc., but also--and much more expensive--earnings foregone and an adequate stipend to provide a living standard presumably not significantly lower than would obtain were the adult to continue to earn in the economy.

In fact, these kinds of considerations have apparently resulted in major modifications to the original model in Europe. For example, recent discussions include the hoped-for utilization of electronic instructional/learning technologies to bring recurrent education to the user, at home, on-the-job, or in neighborhood locations. This modification comes as no surprise, however, to

adult education and learning in the United States. Major American corporations, federal agencies, proprietary schools and community-action agencies have invented, utilized, and modified a whole range of instructional modes, both person-to-person and with electronic media, outside of the traditional instructional standards and norms contained in the core system of formal education.

Experimentation and some success with so-called "para-professionals" is a trade-mark of the periphery of education, formal and informal, for both youth and adults, not of the core system. The new ALPS project (Adult Learning Program Service), of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting represents just one potentially bold effort to develop new ranges of learning opportunities for millions of adults who have not completed high school, without sole concern for the certification and credentialling of these adult learners.

It is true that the metaphor of recurrent education can be applied to any post-compulsory adult education and learning program. But to do so denudes the recurrent education model of its heuristic advantage, which is to teach us something about the alternative social meanings available for the future of post-compulsory education, in all of its rich mix of possibilities. We have, in this preliminary analysis, attempted to use that heuristic leverage to open up for examination a fundamental policy question. It is whether or not the historically rich and pervasive learning behaviors of American adults will be most effectively served in the future by utilizing recurrent education to co-opt that behavior within an expanding formal system of post-secondary education for credit. Our suspicion, based upon this very brief and insufficiently comprehensive analysis, and thus subject to revision at a later stage in our on-going project, is that the future of adult education and learning is not best served by a recurrent education model imported from Europe. Still, research and discussion under way in the Council of Europe, in O.E.C.D./C.E.R.I., and in individual countries including the Scandinavian societies, France and Yugoslavia is much further

advanced on recurrent education than in the United States. No doubt, we have good reason to follow their analysis and implementation as we pursue our own.

## Footnotes

1. CERI/CD (71) 2, Annex 2, Scale 2, Governing Board/Long-term Programme of Work/Programme Area I--Project 2/Recurrent Education, (Note by the Secretariat). June 18, 1971, Paris, p. 3.

2. See, for example, the concise review of alternative uses of the concepts of adult learning and adult education in Wayne L. Schroeder, "Adult Education Defined and Described," in Robert M. Smith, George F. Aker and J. R. Kidd, Handbook of Adult Education. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970.

3. See, for example, A. A. Liveright, A Study of Adult Education in the United States, 1968, the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, and John W. C. Johnstone and Ramon J. Rivera, Volunteers for Learning: A Study of the Educational Pursuits of American Adults, Chicago, Ill: Aldine, 1965.

4. Gale Jenseon, "How Adult Education Borrows and Reformulates Knowledge of Other Disciplines," in Gale Jensen, A. A. Liveright and Wilbur Hallenbeck, eds., Adult Education--Outline of an Emerging Field of University Study. The Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1964, p. 107.

5. Allen Tough, The Adult's Learning Projects, Research in Education Series No. 1. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1971.

6. A. A. Liveright, op. cit., p. 25.

7. For a comprehensive discussion of the success of expanionist educational policies in OECD member countries during the 1960's, and the attendant consequences leading to new questions of who and what education is for in the 1970's, see Maureen Webster, Educational Planning in Transition--Emerging Concerns and the Alternative Futures Perspective, Educational Policy Research Center, Syracuse University Research Corporation, August, 1971.

8. See Daniel Blot, in collaboration with José Seabra, Educational Expansion in OECD Countries Since 1950, (Background Report No. 1), Conference on Policies for Educational Growth, O.E.C.D., Paris, 1971.

9. See Charles Nam, in collaboration with Monique Solliliage, Randolph Quenum and Asa (Aasa) Sohlman, Group Disparities in Educational Participation, (Background Report No. 4), Conference on Policies for Educational Growth, O.E.C.D., Paris, 1971, p. 73.

10. Op. cit., CERI/CD/71/2.

11. See James C. Byrnes, The Quantity of Formal Instruction in the United States (Report No. 2) Syracuse, N.Y.: EPRC, August 1970, reprinted January 1972 and James C. Byrnes and A. Dale Tussing, "The Financial Crisis in Higher Education: Past, Present, and Future." Working Draft. Syracuse, N.Y.: EPRC, June 1971.

12. Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, The Year 2000; A Framework for Speculation on the Next 2000 Years, New York: MacMillan, 1967.

13. The O.E.C.D. literature reviewed for this discussion consisted of the following documents:

- CERI/EG/SG/69.01, Strategy Group/Educational Growth and Educational Opportunity, Paris, September 26, 1969.

- CERI/EG/SG/70.03, Recurrent Education/Objectives, Problems and Implications, Paris, July 23, 1970.

- CERI/EG/SG/70.04, Recurrent Education/A Discussion Paper Concerning Problem Areas to be Examined on the "Feasibility Studies," Paris, July 27, 1970.

- CERI/EG/SG/70.05, Educational Growth and Educational Opportunity (Common Project CERI XXII)/Recurrent Education/Meeting on Feasibility Studies, Paris, October 28, 1970.

- CERI/SG/71.05, Strategy Group/Educational Growth and Educational Opportunity, Second Meeting, Stockholm, 7th - 9th March, 1971/ Recurrent Education, Paris, February 25, 1971.

Five papers submitted to the second meeting of the Feasibility Study Group on Recurrent Education held at Primosten, Yugoslavia, May 18-21, 1971, as follows:

- CERI/EO/71.01, Dr. Hedwig Rudolph, Financial Aspects of Recurrent Education, Paris, May 12, 1971.

- CERI/EO/71.02, Dr. Peter Weingart, Recurrent Education--the Social Issues, Paris, May 12, 1971.

- CERI/EO/71.03, Mr. Guy Palmade, Conceptions of Recurrent Education, Paris, May 13, 1971.

- CERI/EO/71.04, Mr. Ken Gannicott, Recurrent Education: A Preliminary Cost/Benefit Analysis, May 12, 1971.

- CERI/EO/71.05, Recurrent Education/The Educational Dimension, May 15, 1971.